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HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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THE TEST OF CHURCH WORTH.

“But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”—EPH. iv., 20-24.

It is a doctrine of the New Testament that the knowledge of God is made known through the products of the divine Spirit in the human soul. It is that part of the divine nature which is insphered in us, and which shines out from us, that constitutes the essential and most precious part of our knowledge of the divine nature. The knowledge of God may be regarded as external and rational, or as internal and experimental. There are two causes which have turned, and which are still turning, our thoughts more to the investigation of the divine nature in its external aspects: the one in the past has been the embodying of the divine nature in philosophical systems, and teaching them in dogmatic forms, so that we approached the mind of man first on the rational side, or on the side of reason and intellectual apprehension. In our time the same tendency is carried on and intensified, though by an entirely different method—namely, the progress with which material, physical science is opening the secrets of creation, and so bringing the apprehension of God to men from the side of his working—from his creative side.

Now, both of these methods are, within certain limits, indispensable; but both of them are absolutely incompetent to represent the divine nature. That process by which God

may be known to men is one that differs profoundly from these ; and without it no substantial progress can be made in the internal and experimental knowledge of God.

One approaches a magnificent ground and, discerning through the opening trees a mansion, inquires who dwells there. He is told the man's name ; he is told his age ; he is told his occupation. He is a great artist. All this ground, this landscape-picture, is his. He created it. The very building in which he lives is also the product of his thought. Going past the premises from day to day, one comes to feel, "I know who lives there ; I know his name ; I know the man." He has never seen him, he knows him simply by what he has done ; and there is some knowledge which one can acquire in this way. But it chances, some day, that he meets the owner ; he sees his form and figure, and is enabled from his physiognomy to make up his mind somewhat in regard to the man's disposition. Now he may say, "I know the man ; I have seen him, I have spoken with him, and I have a general acquaintance with him." So he has, as much as the neighborhood have. But all this knowledge is as nothing to the knowledge which the man's children, the inmates of his family, those that live in the same dwelling with him, have. The laboring men and the servants all have more knowledge of him than this stranger has, who merely discerns the outer conditions of his life, and the products of his thought and hand-skill. There is not a hostler in his stable, nor a gardener on his ground, that would not say to an outsider, "You may think you know him because you have gone by and seen him, and seen what he has done ; but you ought to live in the same house with him for five or ten years, as I have done, and then you might say that you knew something about him." It is true that the gardener has the advantage over a stranger ; but let the boys from a window overhear this gardener talk with the man, and they laugh and say, to each other, "Hear him talk ; he thinks he knows our father ; but he must live with him as we do, and see him morning, noon and night, and see his disposition, and see the whole play of his inward soul, and then he will know him." The wife and mother, hearing them talk, smiles, and says, "I

love to hear my boys praise their father ; but even they do not fully understand him : I am the only one that understands him."

So it is that as you go in and learn the play of men's dispositions you consciously understand them. You can understand a tree, or you can understand an animal, much more nearly than you can a man. As being grows complex and subtle, it requires that men should become conscious of its interior life before they can be said to be acquainted with it.

No man can understand anything which he has not some specimen of in himself. No man can understand courage if he has no courage. No man can understand reasoning who is incompetent to reason. No man can understand beauty who has not some sense of beauty in himself. No man understands self-denial who has never denied himself for some generous end. And our knowledge of God depends on how much we have in ourselves of that which goes to constitute the interior and essential nature of God.

It is upon this principle that the manifestation of the divine nature is to be made through the church. That is to say, *the church* does not signify what that term was meant to signify in the New Testament, as I understand it—namely, not an organized body of men, but generically all men who are living for God and in personal communion with him. The assembly of illuminated souls, under organization, or with no organization, whose special purpose it is to serve God and their fellows, constitute the church. All men who know God by the interior, whether gathered together in assemblies with definite organizations or not, are God's church. All men interiorly connected with God ; all men who know him by having created in them something like him through which he has interpreted himself to them, and by which they interpret him to other men, are the church of God, are God's people.

It is, then, by the *experience* of those qualities which exist in Christ that we learn him. The pagan idea of God was creative, demonstrative *power* ; the Christian idea of God is *quality*. It does not exclude power, but it does not give it prominence ; it makes it the mere inclosure of something that is more precious—of the soul.

The true conception of divinity is, that it is quality of disposition. The power to create, to sustain, to administer, to govern, is within that which constitutes the divine nature, which is the supremacy of disposition, and the exquisiteness of it. It is the joy and the beauty that go with the interior dispositions of God and that direct the active manifestations of his power.

Now, the kind of knowledge which springs from a participation of the divine nature, or from the life of Christ made manifest in our life, or reproduced by it, is the supreme end of all instruments. This is the end of all culture. This is the end of ordinances in churches, which are instruments to develop in men such a sense of the comprehension of God as shall make them like him, or as shall bring them into a state in which they can understand him, and in a degree represent him to others, both consciously and unconsciously. We shall find in the thirteenth verse of the same chapter a recognition of this:

"Till we come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

He has been saying here that there were different gifts to men—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. He has been saying that all these were ordained, not for the sake of their own sanctity, but for the sake of producing in men a certain moral result; and this moral result was to be carried up to such a degree that we should come into the fullness of the stature of Christ—should be made Christlike.

This, then, is the supreme end of all church existence, of all theological teaching and of all moral institutions. The object is to work in the individual, and thus ultimately in the multitude and in the race, conditions which shall ally them dispositionally to God; and everything which relates to that, everything which tends toward it, is a divine instrument, because it serves the divine ultimate end which is sought in creation.

There is supposed to be a peculiar sanctity in the special moral institutions of the world—and there is, just as there is a sanctity in the household. It is unquestionably true that

children having a father and a mother, and brothers and sisters, and growing up in a well-organized and well-conducted household, are in those conditions which are most likely to develop in them amiable dispositions, industrious habits, and moral tendencies; but is the family the only thing that will do this, because it is one thing, and because it is a legitimate thing? Do my boys learn nothing but what I tell them? Do they learn nothing from what my neighbors tell them? Do they learn nothing by their life in the street and by their associations at school? Do they learn nothing by the playing in upon them of the great world? Some things are bad, and it would be better if these were not; but some things are good, and it is better that these are. Not I alone, but God, speaking in providence,—God, speaking through my neighborhood,—God, speaking in summer and winter,—God, speaking in sickness and in health,—God, speaking by a thousand other persons than myself, that come and go,—God, speaking, in other words, by life in its entirety, is the schoolmaster of my children; but that does not destroy the sanctity of the family. Nor should one turn and say, “There is no need, then, of the family, if children learn in these ways.”

It is by special institutions, and by God’s providence, and by the influences that surround men, that they are instructed; but we are far from saying that because God teaches men in the sphere of human experience, in national existence, in climatic life, in the great round of daily providence, in their business, in sickness and by personal experience, that therefore churches are of no use. They are of very great use; but to suppose that the only thing which God works through is the organized church is a mistake, again, on the other extreme. Churches are needed for their special work in moulding men, in instructing them, in keeping before them the great ends of existence, and in illustrating the dispositions of a true Christian life; but churches themselves are but single channels. All grace does not come through them. All influence does not. Is there no voice in the storm? There was in David’s time, and there was in Isaiah’s time. God spoke in the heavens by the stars, by the sun, by the moon; he spoke

by morning and by evening; he spoke by mountains, by the ocean, by trees and by birds; and does he not yet speak by these things? In the olden times revolutions taught, industry taught; and all manner of influences which bear upon men, and which directly and indirectly affect them, are teaching influences; and are they atheistic and outside of what God intended because they are not in the church? Did not God frame the whole world? and is not the whole framework of society built up by the indirect power of industries and of social influences? They are brought to bear upon the human soul as well as upon the church.

It is not that churches are not necessary, but that they are not the only things needful. They are good often, they are necessary always; but certainly they are not, as they are organized by human instruments, large enough to convey to the world or to a community a rounded conception of God, or of the work of God on the race. The end, therefore, which is sought—namely, that development of the interior nature of man by which his dispositions and affections shall represent the corresponding but purer and nobler dispositions of God—the creation of men in Christ Jesus—this gives value to all the means that are employed; and every church is good that makes Christian men. On the other hand, every church is invalid that does not make Christian men. The end of God in creation is that men shall rise into his likeness and become like him; and whatever tends to bring them into that likeness is valuable in proportion as it does it, and is valueless in proportion as it fails to do it.

Any organization or institution, therefore, which diverts men's attention from the prime end of existence; any theological teaching which leads men away from the external and does not develop in them the true internal disposition of Christ; anything which develops the more rational understanding, and leaves the spiritual life dead, undeveloped, ungrowing, is relatively false. Although the tenets which are taught may be true, the method and the general influence are false. Any church organization that draws men away from true dispositions, whether negatively or positively, is

false. Any institution which is administered in such a spirit that men become partisan and critical, and which thus diverts them from personal holiness, and from living in the same feelings which God dwells in, are relatively unsacred. No ascription of sacredness, no tracery, no lineage, nothing can make that sacred which has not in practical operation the power of developing the love of God in the souls of men.

This, too, I qualify by saying that it is not to be understood as in any degree a fling at churches, or an undervaluing of them, but that it is simply a critical rule by which churches may prove themselves to be true workers, or to be inferior workers, or to be no workers together with God.

There are some methods of instruction and of organization which long experience has shown to be more likely to develop a true disposition in men than others ; and it is that likelihood, it is that presumption, it is the fruit which some institutions bear and which others do not, that gives to them their sanctity. A tree that will not bear is no better for having a good name. You may plant the Northern Spy—one of the best of apples—in your orchard, and if it stands, as some of my trees do, ten or twelve years without bearing an apple, I do not care for the name ; you cannot eat the name ; and it is no better than if you had an elder bush in your orchard. Its lineage is perfect ; it had the right origin ; but there is not a Northern Spy apple on it, and it will not bear.

You may plant grape vines, as I have by the acre, that will not ripen their fruit—the Iona, the Delaware, and other varieties. They are all admirable grapes when you can get them ; but on my farm many of them mildew in the leaf, and many of them spot in the bunches. I do not revile the grape abstractly, nor call it nought : nevertheless, I declare that every one of my vines that does not bear grapes every year is a failure, and that the mere name of the vines does not save it ; and the possibility that other vines do bear delicious clusters does not help those.

Now, no church is sacred in and of itself, nor is any church made sacred by its name, by the line through which it has come down, by its relations, by its ordinances, nor by any appurtenances that belong to it. That is a good vine

which brings good clusters and ripens the fruit, and that is not a good vine which does not do these things, I do not care what the name is.

But do not think that this undervalues churches—it does not : it brings them to a higher glory ; but it is a criticism that strikes through formality and externality.

More than that, I declare the right of every man to be developed without church, without minister, without any external appointments ; but I do not attack external appointments, or minister, or church, in saying this, any more than I attack the great common school system when I declare the right of every man to get an education without the common school system. If a man comes to me for examination, and I find that he knows arithmetic, and writing, and geography, and that he has learned them lying on his belly, before a torch-light, with no master, am I to kick him out because he did not go through the common school ? If he has what the common school was built to give him it is all I ought to ask. But if you ask whether I object to the common school as a place where people should get their knowledge, I say, No. The common school was designed to extend general knowledge, and it ought to be established and maintained everywhere ; but it ought not to be arrogant, and refuse to recognize a man that has knowledge if he did not get it in a particular way. And I say that if a man has obtained knowledge of the Lord God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, it is valid, no matter where he obtained it. If a man has in himself patience, sweetness, the feeling of love, the bounty of benevolence, and a consciousness of the everlasting brooding and waiting nature of God, I do not care whether he comes to them through the Roman Church, or through any other hierarchical church, or through the denomination to which I belong, or whether he gets them from the Shakers, from the Quakers, or from anything or anybody else. If he has these things, that is enough. Whether their way of getting them is the easiest and best way for others to get them is another question, to be answered in another way ; but the fact that the mind and will of Christ is in a man is sufficient.

The County Commissioners often lay out great roads ; and when they have bridged the streams, and filled up the valleys, and marked off the dangerous places by railings, I travel between point and point with great comfort ; but by-and-by a man says to me, " I have a bridle-path, that is more agreeable than that great road, and that cuts off the distance," and he invites me to use it. I say, " Did the County Commissioners lay out this bridle-path ? " " Oh no," he says, " they did not lay it out." " Is it generally traveled ? " " No ; there are but few of us that go backward and forward on it." " Well, if the County Commissioners did not lay it out, and if it is not generally traveled, I think I won't go on it, though it is easier and shorter." If a man wants to go on the great road let him ; but he must not object to others going on the bridle-path. It matters not that some take one and some the other, so that they all reach the common point which they are seeking. The main thing is their getting there, and not the particular road through which they do it. And yet, the road is not unimportant, so far as convenience is concerned.

The revelation of God, then, by the lives of men, and by their personal experiences, is represented as the distinctive Christian method of making God known to the world and to the universe. I need not quote passages to show that Paul was full of it ; but I make this point in order to show the indispensable necessity that there should be liberty of individual development, and also to explain that which I think is the most remarkable illustration of it that history affords. No man can read the letters and other writings of Paul without being struck, when his attention is once called to it, with the enormous egotism of the apostle. The word " I " occurs in some chapters from fifteen to twenty-five or thirty times ; and there is not one of his epistles that does not bristle with " I," " my," " me," " mine." Such intense personality in any literary production of modern times would be esteemed unpardonable. I do not know of another author that ever existed who had such an overpowering sense of his own personality as Paul. There is but one way in which this can be reconciled to our sense of manliness, and

this is by considering that Paul, perhaps to a degree that almost no one before or since ever attained, reflected in every faculty, in every mood, in every phase of his life, the divine disposition. It was God manifest to him that he was speaking of. He was swallowed up in the divine nature. "The life I live," he said, "I live by the faith of the Son of God." He characterized the one that spoke as "not I, but Christ that is in me." He had so identified himself with the nature of God that in the glow of his enthusiasm it was not himself that he was thinking of, but that particular light of God which was shining out of himself; and in all his sufferings, and enterprises, and teachings, and personal experiences, whether in Synagogues, or before Roman governors, or in jail with soldiers chained to his wrist, or wherever he was, it was Paul manifesting Christ.

If the facets of a diamond could only speak, they would cry out, "I see the light; I see the light; I see the light; I see it;" and Paul, as he stood over against the divine nature, was exalted to the intensest sense of egotism and personal experience; and he gave it forth with a simplicity, a child-like frankness and earnestness, that not many of us can understand, and that certainly should not ally him to lower and gross forms of egotism.

Now, the liberty of reproducing in his disposition the nature of God, and of letting it be known, belongs to every man. Where the work of grace is going on in the hearts of men, there is a sanctity in that divine work which ought not to be unduly and rashly meddled with in our attempt to restrain men's liberty, to put them upon such and such spiritual allowances, or to develop them by such and such ordinances. The result of such mistaken meddling is to go far toward defeating the very work which it is sought to accomplish.

God does not work all things in one man. To some is given one grace, and to some another. There is no perfect man. There is no man large enough to represent manhood in all its developments. And much less can any man represent all that is in God. It takes all manner of men to do that. All the elements of a perfect Christian character even

are not found in the best specimens of human nature. Some sides are brought out in one, and other sides are brought out in another ; and is it for him who has zeal and courage and power to make himself the critic of him who has sweetness and gentleness and humility ? Is he who is in the glow of Christian fervor, and who has a speculative intellect, to criticise the practical man, who acts, but does not do much thinking ? The human mind is limited ; but the divine nature is so vast, its stores are so ample, that no museum in the world can give specimens of them all. It takes whole communities of Christian people—the zealous and the calm ; the thoughtful and the unthoughtful ; the emotive and the dry ; the imaginative and the practical—to reflect the various elements of the divine nature, which is made up of the sum of the graces which belong to God's people, high and low, in all churches, and under all circumstances.

The economies of different church schools (I call a church a school) tend to bring out different sides ; and we need them all. If you look at the practical work that is done, where is there a denomination that brings out all those qualities which we see produced by the sum of all denominations ? In one church there is subordination to government, and in another church there is personal liberty. In one church there is taste and a sense of the beautiful, and in another church there is plainness and simplicity. In one church there is silence, and in another there is tumult. It would be very hard to reconcile the stillness of the Quaker with the boisterous experience of the Methodist. You are obliged to put them into different rooms in order that each may develop his grace ; and yet both work toward the development of the one great ideal man. So the divine nature, the fullness of it, and the variety of it, cannot be represented by one individual nor by one sect. It can only be done by all men and all sects.

We are so made that there is a negative to every positive. Every truth has an opposite truth coming toward it, as every spoke in a wheel has another spoke coming toward it. And as in a wheel strength comes from these opposite spokes over against each other, so in the development of human **life**

strength comes from opposite elements. But you cannot make all these elements coalesce or co-exist in the same church. Paul attempted to do it, and see what a time he had of it. Some were prophesying; some were speaking unknown tongues; some were singing; some were praying; some were doing one thing, and some another, and some had nothing to do; and all these wild, divided, incongruous exercises made a vast clangor of confusion.

We are not, then, to attempt to defeat these special personal developments of man by any church regulations. The very diversity, provided it stands steadfastly and undeniably to the production in human experience of those divine elements which are made known in Christ Jesus, is eminently desirable. So that men reproduce these elements, there is no authority under heaven that has a right to say, "Why do ye so?" in respect to the external instruments and means. You have no right to say that everybody shall be sober, or that everybody shall be silent. You have no right to say that everybody shall have a reasoning religion, or that everybody shall have an emotive religion. You have no right to say that beauty and imagination shall be thrown down, or that there shall be no painted windows and no carving in the house of God. Nor has anyone a right to find fault with the plainness of our house. I like plainness and I like ornament; and as I cannot have them both together I take one sometimes and the other sometimes. Both of them are proper. There are all kinds of Christians; and oh, that they would admit each other to be Christians! Oh, that they would take the larger conception that God is served by all his children in all sects and denominations! Then how much greater would be the advance of holiness among men than it is now, where each church says, "The perfect Christian, if anywhere, is to be found among us!"

In this view of the method of divine disclosure, men must be suffered to enjoy personal liberty, or else it will not be possible to avail ourselves of all the means of unfolding the nature of God which belong to human life and human disposition. The spirit of Christ demands not only that there shall be liberty of the individual, but that there shall be

liberty of instruments ; and the genius of Christianity is not to tie up but to untie.

Interpret in this point of view a portion of the 2d of Colossians commencing with the 8th verse :

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

There is a disposition to limit Christ, to narrow him ; but no true system of religion narrows him or limits him. There is a Christ who counted not his own life dear to him. There is a Christ who saith, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends ; and I lay mine down for my enemies.” There are many things developed by church history that are not unimportant ; but the chief question with every man is, “What is the revelation of Christ to me ? and what is that in him which is set over against me for my vindication ?”

“In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power ; in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh [the carnal body] by the circumcision of Christ.”

The apostle was reasoning with the Jews, who were as ignorant about circumcision as we are about baptism. Paul hit them in the place of their prejudice when he said “circumcision ;” and when he told them there was a “circumcision made without hands,” he placed the thing signified in lieu of the image or ordinance, and when he spoke of “putting” off the body of the sins of the flesh,” that was what he meant by circumcision.

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

If a man is buried and baptized with Christ, he is risen spiritually, as much as a man is circumcised spiritually who is circumcised in him, though the priest’s hand does not touch him, the meaning signified by “baptism” having taken the place of the thing by which it was signified.

“And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was

against us [that is to say, that was cumbrous, and too heavy to bear], which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but that the body is of Christ."

Now, I say that while I recognize all ordinances and methods as being useful, yet no man has a right to take ordinances, or methods, or institutions, or creeds, or doctrines, or books, and with them oppress the individual conscience; for he who is of Christ, and who represents Christ in his dispositions, has the body, the substance, the spiritual element, by which all these other things were created. They are schoolmasters; but when I have learned my lesson, and do not need a schoolmaster, I have a right to get along without one; and if I do not need the church and its instruments I have a right to dispense with them.

The great conflicts of church organizations and of systematic theologies have been such as to give them undue importance, and make them an improper dynamical centre. In other words, men feel that a man must be a good man; but that being one, if he does not join a church, and the right church, and learn the right catechism, the mere being good is a secondary quality. The church has passed through such dynastic training, and has been so much associated with actual human governments, and has assumed such authority over the consciences of men, and its officers have claimed to be in such a sense endued by grace from on high, that there has sprung up in the public sentiment of the Christian world the idea that there is a heaven-derived authority in these associations of men. There is no such authority in them. The only value that the combinations of good men have is a quality that shall enable all those to whom they come to develop in themselves the true Christian life; but if they find men developing their true Christian life under other circumstances, they ought to bless God; and, instead of giving them the cold shoulder and the buffet, they ought to rejoice that God works by larger means than those which are contained in any special organization.

I plant flowers because I cannot get them generally in any other way; but having planted them, and they being in bloom, if I go across the hills and find that some chance seeds have blown there, or have come there I know not how, and that under some hedge or in some protected nook there are flowers even finer than mine, do I run in on them and say, "You are not in the right place, and you are not flowers"? Do I say to them, "Your business is instantly to get up and go into my garden"? No; I thank God for all the flowers that I can raise in my garden, and then I thank God for every one that grows out of it; and if I find flowers in unlooked-for places, I have the greater joy. I should be glad to see the very wilderness blossom as the rose.

So goodness among bad people, goodness in unexpected places, goodness in spite of hindrances and obstacles, goodness anywhere and under any circumstances, is a reason for thanksgiving. Anything that brings out in the hearts of men the divine dispositions we ought to be thankful for. It is that which the world longs to see, and it certainly is that which ought to be brought more stringently home on churches—as I will proceed to show.

The attempt to secure moral ends by multiplying instruments, or by increasing the rigor of administration, is contrary to reason, to experience, and to the analogy of divine providence.

While every sect feels itself at liberty to be free from every other sect in the world, every church feels itself at liberty to inveigh against all other churches—which is wrong. I keep house in my way; my friends keep house in their way; and I should consider it bad manners for me to criticise their method of keeping house. They have enough to eat; they are as well dressed as I am; they are active and useful; and while I should resent instantly their intrusion over my threshold, they have a right to resent my intrusion over their threshold. All I ask to know is whether they are respectable persons, worthy citizens, pleasant neighbors, good folks. If they are, that is enough. I have no right to go farther back than that. But while each church feels jealous of its

own rights, it feels at liberty to throw bombs at neighbor churches. Congregationalism feels at liberty to bombard Presbyterianism in its distinctive qualities; Presbyterianism feels at liberty to bombard Episcopalianism, and Episcopalianism feels at liberty to bombard everything.

This may be done tastefully, it may be done sweetly; but that makes no difference. It is not right on that account. If my pocket-book lies on my table, and a man comes in and snatches it, and says, "Mine!" I won't let him have it, of course, after he has taken it in that rude way. If a man comes with the utmost reasoning propriety, and says, "I think that is mine," and takes it, I won't let him have it any more. If a man comes and says, "Ah, my charming friend, what a beautiful life we are all living!" and slips off with it, I won't let him have it either.

When men, with violent arrogance and controversy, say, "You are ours, or nobody's," I resent that. When they undertake to restrict my liberty by elaborate and Baconian logic, I resent that also. They may do it as gracefully and sweetly as silk and satin can make it to be, and I resent it then. I resent the thing. I ask for myself personal liberty, and I ask for everybody personal liberty; and I say, While it is right for them to be jealous for their own faith, it is not right for them to claim that God has given them the only true faith, or that he has given them the monopoly of the true faith. That claim is simply—I will not say what.

At this time we are in much danger on account of the developments that are being made in many quarters. The fact is, the whole earth is hatching. Spring is on the world. There is a development of thought; there is a development of commerce; there is a development in every form of mechanical industry. The nations are coming into new life. In other words, God is breathing life into the whole race, and men are making progress in every direction. There are more church organizations, there is more versatility, and there are more methods. Old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new.

In the woods, next June, when the trees are impleted

with sap, and are beginning to grow, suppose there should be a conference of oak trees, speaking by the voice of the bark? Suppose the bark should say, "I was good enough for these trees last year, and why am I not good enough for them now? There is a restless spirit of innovation that is swelling me off, and I have got to do something to hold on." Meantime the process of growth is going forward in the tree, and the old bark is beginning to be crowded off; and it rubs itself up, and tries to stick to the old tree, saying, "I was here before this impudent, underlying bark undertook to come out." All these counselings and complainings and determinations have no effect, and the growth continues, and the old bark has to give place to something larger and better.

Now, what are men doing but running back to their creeds, and undertaking to rub them up and fix them so that they shall fit the new state of things that has been ushered in?

My boy, sixteen years old, goes away from home to school, and his old clothes are put in the closet. After a year or so he comes home, and I want him to work on my farm, and I undertake to put those clothes on him. I observe that his ankles are shown more than I used to think they were, and that the jacket does not fit him as well as it did; but I say, "These are your clothes, and you have got to put them on. They were made for you, and you must wear them." I insist on his putting on those clothes and wearing them. You will readily see how absurd that is. But is there no advance of human thought? Is there no growth in the expression of spiritual truth? Are there no old doctrines newly stated? Was all the light shed upon the world in the past that it is to have? Is there no conformation of divine thought to human thought in order that it may meet the increasing exigencies of the time?

I insist that men have a right to state what they believe to be true in the language that is familiar to them.

There are many historic facts that will continue to be stated to the end of the world; but all facts of moral government; the philosophy of divine administration; theological systems; theories of mental power applied to the affairs of

mankind—there is not one of these things in regard to which every hundred years does not put the world in a different position; and there must be a readaptation of fitnesses. There are continually new facts to be generalized, new deductions to be drawn, and new emphasis to be put upon points of importance.

Now, while the Westminster Confession, which I was brought up under (as you might judge), in respect to many external facts and historical statements is perhaps as good a condensation as ever will be made, and may not be changed, yet those things which respect its vital elements need to be changed. They do not answer the spirit of the time. I do not mean the wild, fractious uneasiness of our day: I mean the higher feeling, the larger sense of personal liberty, of personal obligation, of divine benignity and of spirituality. God is bringing into the world, by monarchies, and republican institutions, and civilization in all its forms, these great results which have been swelling in human experience; and more and more they take expression in theology and moral government. Old systems and frameworks which were wise and good a hundred years ago do not fit us now.

You may bring together all the scattered facts and doctrines of the Calvinistic system, and you cannot adapt that system to the state of human nature in the present day. It must be let out somewhere. It must be enlarged in some places, and changed in some places. It was admirable in respect to much that is in it for the age that created it, and for the work that it did; but you might as well go to war in our day with the chariots and horsemen of the old Assyrian empire as to take the systems of an old age and with it go into the conflicts of this later day.

At this time, when the world seems to be outgrowing its organizations, I feel that something must be done. I am at home now, you know, and I speak freely, and I confess that I have the fullest sympathy with every single one of the great struggling sects of Christendom; I see that they are doing good, and I would not obliterate one of them. I honor them all, and there is not one of them that I would not cast my lot with if I were shut up to it. They are not

to me heretics or aliens. I look upon them all as brethren. Yet I retain my liberty to speak of them and to criticise them : not, however, as antagonistic to them, but as in fraternal relations with them.

There is an attempt to re-invigorate old instrumentalities, old governments and ordinances, as if that would meet the exigency which is caused by the great providential movements on the globe ; but God is making the divine manhood in man more and more to shine forth through the experience of the individual. Here is inspiration : not authoritative inspiration, but the inspiration of experience.

Holiness is the property of every man that will aspire to it ; and as it comes and works it requires change in men and in instruments.

There are different works going on in different directions, and in different fields. As God did not develop the fine arts in Judea, but did in Greece ; as he did not develop moral sense or philosophy among the Romans, but did ideas of practical government ; so he is developing the different elements of the divine nature among different peoples. As in a foundry the different parts of a vast machine are cast in different departments and brought together and made to work harmoniously, so the great elements in the world's growth are developed by different nations, and in different spheres of life. The mechanic is doing some work which will redound to moral ends ; the speculative man, the metaphysician, is doing other work that will redound to good results ; the scientific man is doing still other work that will redound to the welfare of the race ; and in this age of the world you cannot meet the actions and reactions, and liabilities, and oscillations, which come from these various sources by making theology stronger or church ordinances more rigid. That which brings to the souls of men a sense of God in his benignity, and power, and holiness, and truth, and government ; that which brings God nearer home to the human soul in its liberty and in its largeness ; that which brings men under the control of the divine mind as children under parental control—that will meet the exigencies of the age. In other words, the development of Christ Jesus in the

souls of men will leave the church safe and the community safe. Liberty in holiness is a hundred times safer than liberty in politics—and liberty in politics is safe. Liberty of conscience, liberty of affection, and stimulation of the higher and nobler traits in man, will save the world. Government will not, ordinances will not—certainly they will not when men quarrel over creeds. The manifestation of selfishness and narrowness in the defense of truth is apostasy. Any man who makes the truth ugly, any man who presents the truth so that it leads to alienation and bitterness, any man who makes the truth unattractive to his fellow-men, is denying his Lord. He does not mean it, but it is so. When the truth is stated so as to go against the best instincts of men, it is the fault of those who propound it. They betray the truth. If you can point me to a church in which, when I go through it, I see that, in ranks and companies of matrons and maidens, and of old men and young, on the Sabbath and on week days, in all their outgoings and incomings, there is one radiant life, one perpetual summer, full of all sweet fruits that have ripened, and if they shall rise up and say, “The truth of God is with us,” I will acknowledge their claim on the ground that the power of the divine nature developed in any church is the highest evidence of the divinity of that church. But if any sect comes to me and says, “We claim authority for these views, these ordinances, and these vestments,” and I see that pride and envy and jealousy and all malign passions are working in them, I say to them, “The evidence that Christ is with you does not reach me. Christ does not come in such forms. He does not commit himself to the ministration of persons who represent him through their malign passions.”

Where the truth is, and where it produces patience, and where patience develops meekness, and gentleness, and helpfulness, and loveliness, and lovingness, there is orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is not in the head but in the heart. If a man loves God, and is like him, and loves his fellow-men, and is willing to suffer for them, he is orthodox; and if not, he is heterodox, no matter what church he is in. The church that gives to the world an example of narrowness, of com-

bativeness, of hardness, of uncharitableness, and of censoriousness, can never be made authoritative by putting the name of Christ on it. Neither can a man be made a true Christian simply by putting on him the name of Christ. Let him depart from iniquity, let him represent what Christ is by the development of Christian elements, let him manifest the spirit of Christ toward his fellow-men, and then he will vindicate his claim as being a worthy disciple of the Lord and Master. And let the test as to whether Christ has appointed one church above another be, that that church turns out more Christians of the right stamp than any other. How long shall we make the test to consist in doctrine and external organization? When shall men understand at last that the true church is the most Christlike, and produces the most Christlike members? When that is the test how shall we all have occasion to hide our faces! How few churches are there that would dare to stand before God and say, "Judge us according to our fruit!" We are all poor. There are none of us that can afford to revile and rail at our fellows.

What a scene that would be if the superintending physician of a hospital should come in and find all the patients quarreling with one another, one man insisting that the next man shall take the medicine that the doctor has given him; men with dropsies reviling men with fevers; men with fevers reviling men with cerebral troubles; pallet railing at pallet, and department at department; nurses and patients all mixed up and quarreling!

The church is too much like a quarreling hospital. It is filled with carnal men, men of narrow minds, men of intense selfishness and arrogant pride. There are in it almost none that bring down the dove. The eagle—how seldom the dove! The lion—how seldom the lamb! The armed warrior, with garments rolled in blood—how seldom the meek and the lowly, that imitate Him who yielded himself to the armed band, and laid down his life for the world! What we need above everything else is goodness, *goodness*, GOODNESS.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE rejoice, O Father, that thou hast made thyself known to us by all the names that fill us with joy and confidence. We rejoice that thou art stable in government, and that all the powers of evil shall not have liberty to destroy, and to vex us; that thou wilt maintain steadfastly the great acts of kindness and beneficence; and that though vice and wickedness dash against thee, they shall be rolled back again, and scattered as the waves of the sea are when they dash against the shore. We rejoice that thou art strong in goodness, and that thou dost protect all goodness. We cannot rise to thy methods; we cannot take the measure of thy being; we can only comprehend some of the things which belong to thy nature; but we rejoice that the brightness of the light that lies in the direction of the revelation of thyself grows stronger and stronger, and that though we come into thy presence with conscious feebleness, and with conscious imperfection, nevertheless we come with the sense that the being of God is one of perfect purity, perfect truth, and illimitable power, using that purity, and truth, and power, for the growth, the uprising, and the development of the universe. Do we not behold men before thine hands spring up as structures fair and useful? Do we not behold men who draw forth from blind materials glowing pictures of beauty? and art not thou the supreme Architect and Artist? Art thou not working in human souls, and bringing forth things beautiful, things symmetric, and things enduring? Through the ages what other thing thou dost accomplish we know not; what other spheres thou art peopling we know not; what diversities of being thou art creating we know not; but we rejoice to believe that this world is a specimen of thy work, and that it is one single orb of many wherein thou hast manifested thyself. We rejoice to believe that what we see here is but a sample of what is going on elsewhere. We rejoice to believe that wherever we go in eternal existence we shall find divine unity—the same God, the same methods of thought, the same great ends of living. By searching we cannot find thee out; neither by searching can we find out the sun itself, and yet we rejoice in the light, in the warmth, in the life that springs under its touch; and thou, O Sun of Righteousness, art risen upon a darkened world; and under thy shining how all things come forth into beauty, and fruit, and usefulness! We rejoice in thee. Thine is the government and thine is the power, and we are glad. The glory shall be thine, and is thine where thou art beheld. We rejoice that when we shall see thee we shall ascribe honor, and majesty, and power, and glory and dominion to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever.

We pray that we may be caught up in life, and in our daily duties, into these great truths—into that blessed experience which shall lift us above passions, above prejudices, above all things carnal, of the flesh, and low born. Grant that we may live more in the spirit of sonship; that we may feel our nobility; that we may dwell in the regality of those experiences which are breathed from the

soul of God; and grant that from day to day we may walk among men serving them, blessing them, enlightening them, comforting them, and cheering them; and that we may so learn what thy life is, and what thou art doing perpetually in the joy of endless existence.

We pray that thou wilt draw near this morning to all thy servants who are gathered together, and look upon them with thine eye of beneficence, and that spirit of goodness which pervades the universe. Look, we beseech thee, upon every one in his limitation, and transgressions, and sin, with divine compassion and mercy. Help every one to be conscious of his weakness, and infirmity, and sinfulness. May no one seek to hide from God the real state of his mind and thought. May all stand willingly open before him with whom they have to do, knowing that his eye searches and knows to the uttermost act, and thought, and motive, and feeling. We pray, since we are naked and open before him with whom we have to do, that we may, so far as we can, ourselves discern ourselves; and may we ask for the light and for the searching of thine eye. Search us, O God! and try us, and see if there be any evil in us; and help us to cast out the sin of selfishness, and pride, and vanity, and untowardness that offends thee. Help us day by day to cleanse our hearts and our lives. May thy spirit evermore be cleansing to us.

And so we beseech of thee that thou wilt draw near to all those in thy presence who need thy sustaining power; who need the sympathy and conscious presence of God; who need the over-ruling providence of God; and we beseech of thee that as thou seest their need thou wilt teach them how to pray, so that in their prayer they may feel that God is listening in his own time and way, and will work out answers of mercy. We beseech of thee, that we may be able to pray evermore, saying, Thy will be done. We bless thee for thine own example when, overborne and well-nigh crushed to the earth, thou didst pray for relief. We thank thee that when relief did not come thou didst say, "Not my will but thine be done;" and we pray that we may not count ourselves better than the Master. If he suffered, and drank the cup to the very dregs, so may we be willing, if it be the pleasure of God, to suffer to the end. May we be made courageous, and may we have faith that as thine angels came to strengthen thee, so God's messengers will come and camp around about those who are bestead. May we have faith to discern the chariots and horsemen in the heavens filled with God's messengers, as did thy servants of old.

Bless, we beseech of thee, those that are bereaved, with all tenderness and ministration of hope. May they be comforted. Grant that they may not feel that they are set apart for judgment, and that God deals unkindly with them, or that they have not deserved the chastisement of thine hand. May we remember that it is not in wrath that thou dost chastise, but that it is for our profit, that we may become partakers of the holiness of God; and so may every one who is in deep affliction know how to possess himself patiently; how to wait for God; how to be courageous; how to be more and more manly in suffering. And so we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless

to them present trouble, that by and by it may work out in them the visible fruits of righteousness.

May those who are standing in the midst of disappointment and overthrow not lose faith of God nor of man. Grant that we may repel the desolations of this present life by drawing upon the future life. We have no continuing city here; we seek one to come. The tabernacles which we build here on earth go down before time and the storm; but there is a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. There may our thoughts dwell, and there may we be sure that we have a place, and that there is rest where no storm shall ever reach us, and where it remaineth, waiting for our coming.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon all the families that are represented here. Strengthen thy servants that they may come in and go out before their households in the fear of the Lord, and in the love of Jesus Christ; and may their children grow up in honor and usefulness.

Bless the labors of thy servants in this church. May all our schools be remembered of thee. May those who teach in them be themselves cleansed. Grant that they may not be puffed up with pride as if their service was so meritorious. May they rejoice rather that they are worthy to do anything for the cause of God. Revive thy work in all our classes, and schools, and households. We pray that thou wilt bless to-day thy dealings with this church. And make it more and more spiritual, more and more fruitful, more and more confident in the strength of God, and less and less confident in its own strength.

We pray that thou wilt revive thy work in all the churches of this neighborhood. May they be built up in holiness. In numbers may they increase by drawing men from darkness to light. May thy servants be strengthened to understand better the truth of God, and to preach more and more from the illustration of their own heart's experience.

May thy kingdom everywhere prevail. May knowledge spread. May teachers go forth to those who are desolate and in need.

We pray that our laws may be more and more just, and that their administration may be more and more equal and right.

May thy kingdom come among all the nations of the earth. Let slavery, and ignorance, and superstition, and everything that is wrong cease. May sorrows, and sighing, and tears at length flee away; and may the new heaven and the new earth in which dwelleth righteousness appear.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit.
Amen.

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